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SILCHESTER.*

BY THE EDITOR.

MORTIMER is the nearest station to Silchester, and from thence you make your way through glorious country, now through cornfields, now by the high road, and now by a hollow lane between steep banks, like those of Selborne. Everywhere there are cornfields, the glow broken only by groups of elms. At last we come to long lines of regular green mounds, bearing large trees in many places. These mounds enclose an immense space, under corn for the most part, but in one large patch the soil is broken up as if for building, and, even at a distance, you see low walls, foundations of houses. And this is Silchester! Most curious it is that the name and memory of a city should attach to so lonely a spot, and all the more curious because you would expect that the circumstances which attracted a Roman population should have continued in force, and that city after city should have grown up insensibly on the original site. So with London; dig ten feet below the surface in the heart of the city and you come upon tessellated pavements of Londinium, upon the penates of a Roman household, upon the dust heap of the Roman city, containing a thousand hints of its daily life. But what since? "The drums and tramlings of three conquests," and the ancient Londinium breaking out of its old barriers and swelling and swelling until we have that world's wonder, the London of to-day.

Silchester could have been no more than one of the ninety-two Roman cities enumerated by Richard of Cirencester, and that only if he notices it under another name than that of Calleva Atrebatum, now fixed upon by the archaeologists as its Roman designation. But the so-called "Silchester" was a walled city, the walls enclosing an area equal to that of Londinium, and the foundations of important public buildings have been unearthed. Plainly, this Roman Calleva was no mean city. What advantages of situation, we ask, were the making of it, and why was its ruin final? It has been aptly called the British Pompeii—not that sudden destruction came upon it unawares, but that the explorer here, as there, turns

* A Branch of the P.N.E.U. made, lately, an expedition to Silchester, in the north of Hampshire, an example worth following.

up endless traces of the old Roman life and *of no other*; there is no sign at all that succeeding conquerors rebuilt and settled in the sacked and devastated town. In all likelihood it was a stipendiary city, the capital of the Atrebatii, who were permitted to retain their native prince as a legate of the Emperor. All the time of the Roman occupation of Britain the land was cultivated by native tribes; and here we have a great agricultural centre, a gathering-place of the tribes, so to speak, of a wide district, having communication by means of the great junction roads with fully a dozen Roman stations, ministering to Roman needs, under Roman law, kept in order by a Roman garrison, and yet strictly a British town.

The paucity of British remains proves nothing. Whatever their British origin the civil life the inhabitants knew would be that of Roman citizens, and their remains would, for the most part, be *Roman* remains. The Romans gone, the *raison d'être* of Silchester ceased: an agricultural people came who wanted no emporium for the produce of the land, from whence pulse and wheat-meal for *pulmentum* should be distributed by road to a score of military stations. It is supposed that Ælla, the founder of Wessex, took Silchester on his way to Bath; allow that its fortifications enabled it to make a bold stand against the invaders—once inside the gates they would make havoc of the town. They wanted nothing of it themselves, nor would they leave it in a condition to be a rallying-place for the conquered tribes. The population of the city once dispersed, the ploughing up of its streets, the burying of its foundations, followed in natural course, for the conditions were never repeated which made Silchester an important city: never again was South Britain held by scattered military colonies, for the systematic feeding of which it was necessary to make provision.

The enclosed area of the Roman city is nearly a mile and a half in circumference, and contains about 100 acres. Excavations were begun here by the late Duke of Wellington, under the superintendence of Mr. Joyce, formerly doctor of Silchester, whose antiquarian knowledge and great interest in the work have been of public service in preserving this unique illustration of Roman Britain. The work has proceeded but slowly, for even a duke (the land is within the domain of Strathfieldsaye) may well hesitate to sacrifice all the fine land within the city walls; and with so much bread for

the living waving before him, who would choose to lay the whole open, a city of the dead? The wheat we saw here was unusually fine, every ear heavy with fat kidneys of wheat.

In the little museum, an iron room within the walls, the remains collected by Mr. Joyce and his followers in antiquarian research were carefully arranged. It is worth while to see this most interesting collection *before* you examine the remains of the city, for here is enough to bring the whole routine of its daily life before you. Here is locksmiths' work, potters' work, cutlers' work, jewellers' work; and you may fill the shops with craftsmen, and the city streets with the clatter of wooden clogs, as the artisans go, tools in basket, here and there about their work; you may see, too, the grave citizen clad in toga on his way to the forum, and the Roman lady in flowing palla—women and men stately of tread and dignified of mien, for these cumbrous Roman garments were not to be worn jauntily. Every ~~straw~~ which indicates the current of the old city life is touching—

"Tibulæ without a robe to clasp,
Obsolete lamps, whose light no time recalls,
Urns without ashes, tearless lachrymals:"

one urn with ashes, toys of the little children, a little horse, and a cock, and a tiny tool like an axe, bone hairpins, with round heads about the size of a pea, enamelled brooches, two or three little toilet implements, everything but that "Roman Lady's Hair" to be seen at York. With these before you, on the very spot where they were worn, or made, or used, it is not difficult to conjure up some semblance of the old life. There is a good deal of pottery, though none of the vessels are quite perfect, mostly of a grey ware, a black ware with a fine glaze, and the handsome Samian. Here are water pitchers, pipkins, lamps, urns, knives and scissors, the tools of the stonemason, of the worker in mosaic, stags' horns in the act of being made into knife-handles, much blacksmiths' work—hinges, bolts, locks, keys, &c.; a good many suspicious-looking little nozzles, plainly made to fit the mouth. Coins have been turned up in great numbers, covering a period of five centuries.

Having learnt what we can of the old life, let us turn back to the point by which we entered and see the city. We go in through Mr. Cooper's farmyard, where was the principal entrance to the city, from London *via* Staines (Pontes): enough of the masonry of this great eastern gate remains to show that

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it stood 28 feet square, with a couple of guardrooms in each pier. Near the farmhouse you see, too, filled with water, a bit of the *fosse*, which originally surrounded the city; now it is partly choked by the ruins of the wall. Beyond the ditch was the external vallum, or earthwork, which may still be traced all round the city, 15 feet in height in some parts, and hardly distinguishable in others. The inner walls, *the* walls of the city, are some ten feet thick and 20 feet in height on the south side, where they are most perfect.

You go through a path in the cornfield to the point where the excavations are being carried on. The first thing that strikes you is an opened square with rows of the foundations of houses on all four sides; beyond are further excavations showing the forum, &c. The most touching thing to us was the flooring of inch square tiles, exposed in several of the houses and in the public baths, greatly worn by the tread of Roman feet. The walls are of rough flints, with strong courses of long Roman brick, or of stone, in the shape of these long thin bricks, and there are many fragments of columns, capitals, &c., scattered about, but not *in situ*; and as for millstones, there are enough to stock all the museums in the kingdom. Here you notice what is so often remarked upon, the slightly stunted appearance of the corn indicating the positions of the streets. As in all Roman towns the main streets ran due north and south, east and west, the principal street being fully 30 feet wide.

In the very heart of the city stood the forum, a great rectangular mass, plain enough, probably, on the exterior, but highly finished within, with the Basilica occupying the western and smaller division of the block; and here we have remains second in interest only to those of Pompeii, for the exterior walls have been traced completely round and laid open, and the uses determined of the walls, chambers, and even of the shops. Here we have the court of justice, the market place, the exchange, the public offices of an important city, whither it is conjectured the tribes in the south of Britain came at stated periods of the year to pay their tribute, or taxes, and to settle their legal disputes. The forum had public offices on the south, and shops on the north and east, behind an arcade, and the shops of the fishmongers, butchers, poulterers, money-changers, have been identified by oyster shells, mutton bones, coins, found in those particular squares.

The Basilica was a noble hall, 276 feet long by 60 feet wide, with a tribunal at either end, as in that of Trajan; the semi-circular apsis marked off by rails for the magistrate's court is clearly defined; for the rest, imagine a church with aisles and nave, unroof the nave and support the roof of the aisles with pillars, and you have the usual form of the Roman Basilica. On the west side are half-a-dozen large chambers, the use of which have not been discovered. In one of these was unearthed the celebrated legionary eagle—identified by comparison with sculptures on Trajan's column—wrenched from its staff and deprived of its wings. Did the standard-bearer hide it to save it while he fled for his life, or did he tear off its golden wings and thrust the rest out of sight as he hurried to join the rebel army of Allectus? This bronze eagle is now in the possession of the Duke of Wellington. Half-a-dozen blocks of private dwellings have been numbered by Mr. Joyce in his valuable descriptions, and the largest of these, he considers, was, in all likelihood, the dwelling of one of the Duumviri; the apartments were built round an open space—the atrium, and mosaic pavements, many coins, and two hypocausts, one for warming the triclinium, are among the finds in this important block.

The amphitheatre, at some little distance from the north-east angle of the city walls, is now overgrown with trees, but the high steep banks on which the spectators crowded may be distinguished. These are twenty yards thick at the bottom, but thin off to a width of four yards at the top and were cut into five rows of seats with six feet of slope between the rows. With the exception of that at Dorchester this is the largest amphitheatre in England, but the interest of lining the great space with a compact mass of living beings, gathered from all quarters, is lessened when one realizes the horrible show they have come to see—the hardness with which they would sacrifice life by the silent lowering of thumbs.

As an object lesson in Roman history, Silchester is profoundly interesting; with the remains of the ancient city before us, we realise those Roman qualities which made Rome a great empire—the perfect organisation, the strong rule, the high civilisation; we realise, too, that our civilisation is on a different, and, thank God, on a higher plane than the Roman citizen knew.

THE MER-MOTHER'S SONG.

Sing hey! sing ho! my little mermaiden,
Sky-blue eyes and glittering tail!
Wandering winds from the shore, rose-laden,
Flutter her hair to a golden veil.

Sing ho! sing hey! my pearl of the ocean,
My little pinkeen so lithe and fleet!
What care I for the waves' commotion,
Or the tempest's wrath, so I have my sweet?

Hush-a-bye on the heaving billow,
Sleep, my pretty one; sleep, my dear;
Cool and soft is thy crystal pillow—
Sleep, my baby, and have no fear.

Murmur around her, wavering water;
Sing her a sea-maiden's lullaby!
Sleep, my baby, my little daughter,
For the winds are hushed and no peril's nigh.

Sing hey! sing ho! my little mermaiden,
My joy, my jewel, my pet, my pearl!
O, summer ocean, with sunshine laden,
Waft all good things to my baby girl!

H. L. H.

IV. Stratfieldsay

"Great in council & great in war,
 Foremost captain of his time,
 Rich in leaving common sense,
 And, as the greatest only are,
 In his simplicity - sublime." Longfellow

Three miles or so from Lillchester, through a pleasant tree-shaded lane, running between corn crops, green crops, & a little waste land, brings you to Stratfield say. 'Why go to Stratfield say?' we were asked: true, it is by no means a show place, nor is it connected with any very interesting passages in the life of the Duke of Wellington, but then, he lived here; here, & at Balton, were spent what little of private life he enjoyed. All the world came to him at Ashley House, but here, he had the few friends of his youth to whom he was most attached.

His old friend, Arthur Thurst, was his companion here, as always; & when you see the pleasant walk across the lawn from the house to the river which the two would pass after dinner, and then, "Arthur, halt, &c." - "Now, Arthur, I give you out long enough. The dew is falling & you'll catch cold".

Now, within the park, is the church. Outside the Duke used to go to take his visitors whether they would or no; & you see the pen, wherein he would repeat every response with vigorous precision, & then, feeling that his part was done, would relapse during the sermon, but not always into silence. Here is the parson, where Copenhagen lived out his life, -

"Blessed to the height
 Of all good & all delight"

Precious to his nature, -
 You did not the Duchess's own hands bring him